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ABSTRACT

Reported was an experiment in which the parents of an 8-year-old learning disabled girl used materials from the Language Improvement to Facilitate Education (LIFE) Project in the home under the supervision of a classroom teacher. The S was presented with an average of two filmstrips each day over a 12-week summer period. Data indicated that the S steadily progressed through the instructional system in the order of visual perception, thinking activities, and language development. Thinking activity filmstrips were found to be especially helpful in indicating specific weaknesses in memory skill which were remedied by having the S repeat aloud the information indicated on given memory frames. It was reported that the S increased her vocabulary by a known quantity of 158 words, acquired new confidence, and learned to assemble new words into sentences. S' response to the Project LIFE program was said to be very positive and enthusiastic. The S' parents recommended that Project LIFE be used in the home by parents of learning disabled children to accelerate and complement classroom instruction. (GW)

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A Cooperative Parent-Teacher Model Using The Project LIFE Instructional System

Project LIFE Report 73 - 2

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A COOPERATIVE PARENT-TEACHER MODEL USING THE PROJECT LIFE INSTRUCTIONAL SYSTEM

The degree and means to which parents of handicapped children should be supportive of classroom instruction has never been firmly established. In many instances parents of handicapped children have been left without specific guidelines or objectives as to what they might do to enhance and to supplement the education of their child outside of the classroom situation. In an effort to assist parents and teachers, Project LIFE has undertaken several investigations in which the parents were directly involved in cooperation with the school in the education of their handicapped children. One such project is reported herein as a potential model which empirically demonstrates the possibilities of such cooperative endeavors.

The case under consideration involved an eight year old girl, hereinafter referred to as Pam, and diagnosed as having a functional learning disability. The paper prepared herein is based upon the research report prepared for Project LIFE by the girl's parents. It is believed that the report demonstrated unequivocally that parents can be directly involved in the educational process and can be supportive of the child's academic teacher and classroom curriculum.

Background and Rationale

As recommended by the Arlington County Special Education Office, Pam was placed in a special education learning disabilities class. Pam's parents were extremely

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concerned about the nature of her learning disability and the educational future of their daughter. In an attempt to better understand the nature of learning disabled children, the parents attended several meetings of the Northern Virginia Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (NVACLD).

Pam's father noted with interest that parents, as well as teachers, expressed vagueness in their ability to clearly pinpoint academic weaknesses and remediation techniques of most children with learning disabilities. Additionally, parents were advised "not to become involved in the academic learning process with their children." Rather, they were told to "provide a rich variety of non-academic experiences in the home and to insure that the child's functional needs were met."

Pam's father learned of Project LIFE through a presentation in Arlington County by one of the Project's administrators. The father immediately proceeded to explore the possible application of this instructional system in the home environment under the administration of the parents, but involving the support and supervision of the classroom teacher. The father's main concern was to determine the feasibility of such a parent-teacher cooperative effort in maximizing the educational and emotional growth of such children with learning disabilities.

Objectives of the Investigation

The father, in cooperation with the Research Department of Project LIFE and the child's classroom teacher, established three general objectives of the investigation. These were:

1. To employ the Project LIFE "diagnostic" filmstrips to identify specific perceptual, cognitive, and linguistic weaknesses of the child;

2. To determine whether the Project LIFE instructional system could be utilized under the guidance and administration of the child's parent in (a) remediating specific diagnosed disabilities, and (b) complementing and reinforcing classroom instruction; and

3. To inform the members of NVACLD and the special education teachers in the County of the availability of Project LIFE materials for classroom and home use, and the degree to which the present investigation proved successful.

The investigation was conducted over a period of twelve (12) weeks during the three summer months of 1972.

Procedures

Pam's father initiated the investigation by introducing Pam's teachers and a representative of NVACLD to Project LIFE. He discussed the proposed objectives of the investigation and he demonstarted the operation of the Project LIFE system. He demonstrated that the LIFE materials were prepared in sequential and hierarchical levels, with purposes and behavioral objectives prepared for each filmstrip. He showed how the materials were designed for individualized instruction and had built-in techniques for allowing the student to progress at his/her own rate.

At the conclusion of the meeting, there was a favorable reaction and general consensus that the investigation should be carried out. Subsequently, Pam's parents obtained a Project LIFE Student Response Program Master and three individualized

learning components: perceptual training, thinking activities, and language development.

The Project LIFE research staff provided the guidelines for use of the instructional system, including the testing and sequencing procedures, as recommended by academic institutions field testing the LIFE system. The LIFE Research Department requested that Pam's school adequately assess Pam's academic test scores in the spring and again in the fall. Careful records were kept on error data for each filmstrip and additional subjective data were accumulated regularly during the entire investigation. Pam was presented with an average of two filmstrips per day. Observations were made on the patterns of errors to assist in determining any specific difficulties that she might be encountering. In addition, auditory word cards were employed to increase vocabulary learning as supplemental to the language skill units.

Results

At the conclusion of the twelve week investigation, Pam's father prepared a research report for Project LIFE. The report indicates that Pam steadily progressed through the instructional system in the order of visual perception, thinking activities, and language development.

Pam's parents found minimal weaknesses in visual perception and thinking activities. However, Pam's behavior was observed as unusually slow, and her initial responses were considered overly deliberate. The area that caused the greatest difficulty was the thinking activity "memory skill" tasks. The parents stated that her difficulty in this area is consistent with their own observation of Pam, as well as with the observations of Pam's previous teachers.

The Project LIFE thinking activity filmstrips in Level II (No. 5-7) were the specific indicators of weaknesses in memory skill. Pam frequently verbally expressed

herself by saying, "I can't remember." After some experimenting, the LIFE Research staff suggested to Pam's parents that she repeat aloud the information indicated on given memory frames. This appreciably increased her correct responses and also her rate of responses. Pam completed the entire area of visual perception with a minimal number of errors. Except for the visual memory area, she also completed the thinking activities area within the error criterion recommended. With the modified memory procedures, she was also able to complete the memory filmstrips without surpassing the allowable number of errors.

According to Pam's parents, the most "remarkable progress" was in language development. Pam's early inability to comprehend the words in the first language materials was evident by the error rate for these filmstrips. A word bank was created to stimulate increasing vocabulary by using words from the vocabulary sheets which were provided. Pam increased her vocabulary by a known quantity of one-hundred and fifty-eight (158) words. She learned to assemble new words into sentences in the course of the investigation. Also, she acquired a new confidence and self-acceptance which was attributed to the programmed learning materials. At the completion of the investigation, she asked to read books and she was willing to accept new "risks" of unknown words. This behavior was in clear contrast to her outlook at the beginning of the investigation.

During the summer, Pam daily requested the use of the Project LIFE materials. She also stated this to her teacher in the fall. Her teacher sent a card to the parents which read,"Pam has asked permission to bring this book home to read to you. She is doing exceptionally well and has lost nothing over the summer months. She has read to page 105 in this text. How is Project LIFE coming? Pam says she loves it."

According to Pam's teacher, motivation has been the bi-product of her interest in Project LIFE and has lead to measurable higher performance.

Recommendations and Conclusions

The parents, based upon this experience, recommend the use of the Project LIFE system by parents of children with learning disabilities. According to the parents, "It was satisfying to be able to participate in a positive learning experience with my child under a minimal amount of supervision." The parents stated that the LIFE system enables the child to discover that he can learn independently and, more importantly, that learning can be fun. Increased motivation and confidence were key outcomes of the experiment. It was hoped by the parents that the experiment would lead to emotional growth, as well as educational growth.

The experiment indicated that, under certain conditions, parents can accelerate and complement classroom instruction. The guidelines and sequencing prepared by the Project LIFE professional staff does not require an educational professional person, or even a para-professional to administrate the program. Instructions for use of the materials are self-explanatory and flexible enough to be adapted to the skill levels of the particular children. This was viewed as an important consideration in determining the feasibility of expanding this model to other situations of parent involvement in the educational process.

Implications

The utilization of the Project LIFE materials in the home environment as an extension of the classroom work proved to be a satisfactory arrangement. In the final report, the parents stated, "There is no question as to the value of the Project LIFE

system of programmed learning in optimizing the growth and development both emotionally and educationally." The results of this study were reported to NVACLD. The response of NVACLD parents and teachers was enthusiastic and a great deal of interest was expressed in additional comparable arrangements. Pam's teacher expressed her continuing interest in the Project LIFE system and has requested it for her classroom use. She stated that she will also encourage other teachers and parents to use the system to complement classroom instruction.

Although the Project LIFE system was originally designed for hearing impaired children, this investigation supports the hypothesis that special language materials may be appropriate for a wide range of language disabled children. Though the etiology of language deficiencies may be totally different, many of the remediation techniques may parallel or overlap one another.